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Message Text

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S E C R E T STATE 288036 TOSEC 310030

NODIS
FOR WISNER

FOLLOWING REPEAT LONDON 18959 ACTION SECSTATE 24 NOV 76

QUOTE S E C R E T LONDON 18959

NODIS

DEPARTMENT PASS GENEVA FOR WISNER

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: PFOR, RH, UK
SUBJECT: RHODESIA: CHONA ON GENEVA

REFERENCE: LONDON 18741

1. EMBASSY OFFICER SAW MARK CHONA EVENING OF NOVEMBER 23 AT LONDON'S PORTMAN HOTEL. CHONA BEGAN WITH A DESCRIPTION OF HIS MEETING (NOVEMBER 19) WITH MARGARET THATCHER AND THE NEW CONSERVATIVE SHADOW FOREIGN MINISTER JOHN DAVIES. CHONA SAID HE IS CONFIDENT THAT THE TORIES WILL NOT ROCK THE RHODESIAN BOAT FOR THEIR OWN DOMESTIC POLITICAL ADVANTAGE.
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QWM CHONA REITERATED EARLIER ARGUMENTS THAT BRITAIN MUST SET A FIRM DATE FOR RHODESIAN INDEPENDENCE (REFTEL). ASKED WHETHER A FIRM DATE COULD ALSO PROVIDE AN ASSURANCE FOR ELECTIONS BEFORE INDEPENDENCE, CHONA SAID THAT THE PATRIOTIC FRONT HAD ALREADY CONCEDED THE POINT OF ELECTIONS. THE FRONT'S POSITION, WHICH REMAINS UNCHANGED, SPECIFICALLY RECOGNIZES THAT INDEPENDENCE WILL BE PRECEDED BY THE NECESSARY LEGAL PROCESSES INCLUDING ELECTIONS. CHONA OFFERED THAT TO FIX A DATE FOR ELECTIONS WOULD ONLY CONFIRM THE NATIONALIST POSITION THAT THE PROCESSES CAN BE COMPLETED BEFORE THE FIRST OF MARCH 1978. HE PAID TRIBUTE TO NKOMO FOR HAVING ALREADY WON MUGABE'S AGREEMENT THAT ELECTIONS ARE AN ESSENTIAL STEP LEADING TO INDEPENDENCE, BUT HE CRITICIZED THE BRITISH FOR FAILING TO SEIZE THIS POINT. HE INSISTED THAT THE FRONT LINE PRESIDENTS ARE NOW UNIFIED ON THE NECESSITY FOR BRITAIN TO SET A FIRM DATE, AND THAT THE UNCONDITIONAL FIXING OF MARCH 1, 1978 WOULD BE UNANIMOUSLY ACCEPTED.

3. ASKED TO DESCRIBE RELATIONS BETWEEN NKOMO AND MUGABE, CHONA PROCEEDED TO A LONG AND CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF BRITAIN'S APPARENT TACTICS WITH THE PATRIOTIC FRONT. NKOMO IS THE PIVOTAL MAN ON THE NATIONALIST SIDE, HE SAID. THE BRITISH, HOWEVER, SEEM TO BE WORKING TOWARDS A OOINT WHERE NKOMO WILL EVENTUALLY BREAK WITH MUGABE AND NEGOTIATE ALONG WITH THE OTHER TRADITIONAL NATIONALIST LEADERS. THIS IS A SERIOUS MISTAKE, CHONA DECLARED. SUCH A SPLIT WOULD LIKELY ALSO SPLIT THE FRONT LINE PRESIDENTS AS WELL AS THE REST OF AFRICA. (CHONA CLAIMED THAT BRITAIN HAD ALREADY ATTEMPTED TO DIVIDE THE PRESIDENTS BY COMMUNICATING WITH SOME ON THE ISSUE OF THE DATE BUT NOT WITH OTHERS. HE ATTRIBUTED NYERERE'S ABOUT-FACE TO THIS DEVIOUS TACTIC.) INSTEAD, THE BRITISH SHOULD AIM TO HAVE NKOMO BRING ALONG MUGABE, AND TO HAVE MUGABE IN TURN BRING ALONG ZIPA. CHONA CONCEDED THAT THERE ARE IRRECONCILABLE ELEMENTS IN ZIPA--HE NAMED TONGOGARA, TADERERA, AND GUMBO--WHO HAVE NO INTEREST IN THE CONFERENCE AND CERTAINLY NO INTEREST IN ELECTIONS. BUT, HE INSISTED, THESE ARE THE HARD-LINERS WHO SHOULD EVENTUALLY BE ISOLATED, NOT MUGABE. ONCE ISOLATED, THEY WILL BE
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SEEN TO BE THE SPOILERS, THE ASSASSINS OFCHITEOO, THE LEADERS WITH NO FOLLOWING.

4. CHONA SAID THE PROCESS OF NKOMO'S BRINGING ALONG MUGABE IS ALREADY UNDERWAY AND MUST BE ENCOURAGED. NKOMO IS EMERGING AS THE LEADER OF THE PATRIOTIC FRONT. HE IS A SKILLFUL NEGOTIATOR AND HIS STAFF WORK IS METICULOUS. MUGABE HAS NO LAWYERS WITH HIM AND NO DEVELOPED POSITIONS

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ON THE ISSUES. WHEN A PAPER IS DISCUSSED WITHIN THE FRONT, IT IS NKOMO'S DRAFT TO WHICH MUGABE'S MEN CAN ONLY OFFER AMENDMENTS. IF THE DATE ISSUE IS RESOLVED AND IF THE BRITISH CONTINUE TO BE REASONABLE, THEN MUGABE WILL INCREASINGLV COME UNDER NKOMO'S SWAY AS THE NEGOTIATIONS PROCEED. MUGABE WANTS A PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT, CHONA SAID, AND NOT VIOLENCE FOR ITS OWN SAKE. MUGABE WILL ULTI-MATELY BREAK WITH THE ZIPA HARD-LINERS WHEN HE RECOGNIZES THAT A SETTLEMENT CAN BE ACHIEVED AND THAT HIS OWN BEST CHANCE IN ELECTIONS IN A FUTURE ZIMBABWELIES WITH NKOMO. BUT, CHONA WARNED, ALL FOUR NATIONALISTS AND IF POSSIBLE SOME ZIPA ELEMENTS MUST SIGN THE FINAL AGREEMENT, AND BRITAIN MUST WORK TO THIS END.

5. CHONA SHOWED LITTLE CONCERN ABOUT THE WHITE RHODESIAN ROLE IN THE GENEVA DRAMA. HE DESCRIBED A POIGNANT SCENE OF A FEW DAYS AGO WHEN, DURING A RECESS IN A PLENARY SESSION, VAN DER BYL AWKWARDLY SAUNTERED INTO THE LOUNGE TO HAVE COFFEE WITH THE OTHER DELEGATES. "EVEN HE IS TRYING," CHONA SAID. CHONA BELIEVES IAN SMITH HAS ALREADY SURRENDERED ON THE BASIC ISSUES AND HOPES THAT DAVID SMITH WILL BE THE WHITE LEADER WHO RETURNS TO GENEVA TO NEGOTIATE THE FINAL PACKAGE. HE IS CONFIDENT THAT THE STRUCTURE OF THE INTERIM GOVERNMENT CAN BE FOUNDED ON THE FIVE PRINCIPLES.

6. CHONA IS EQUALLY CONFIDENT THAT THE MOZAMBICANS, LIKE MUGABE, CAN BE BROUGHT ALONG TOWARDS A REASONABLE SET-TLEMENT. CHISSANO'S PRESENCE IN GENEVA HAS BEEN USEFUL, HE SAID. THE MOZAMBICAN FOREIGN MINISTER HAS BEEN ABLE TO SEE THE PROCESS FOR HIMSELF, AND MACHEL WILL ENDORSE WHATEVER AGREEMENT THE FOUR NATIONALIST LEADERS ACCEOT.

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7. WHEN ASKED IF DISCUSSIONS OF THE INTERIM GOVERNMENT COULD BE CONFINED TO QUESTIONS OF STRUCTURE AND NOT IN-CLUDE CONSTITUTIONAL OR FRANCHISE ISSUES, CHONA RE-PLIED AFFIRMATIVELY. "THOSE PROBLEMS ARE NOT FOR GENEVA TO DECIDE," HE SAID.

ARMSTRONG
UNQUOTE ROBINSON

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